

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, April 25, 2014**

**Notes from Commissioner Gist**

1. LEAs encouraged to communicate with, develop plans for seniors who have not yet met [graduation](#) requirements
2. RIDE nearing completion of [ESEA Flexibility](#) Request renewal application
3. East Greenwich, Providence high-school seniors named as 2014 [Presidential Scholar](#) semifinalists
4. Pell School, Greene School selected as 2014 [Green Ribbon Schools](#)
5. Woonsocket school complex recognized as [outstanding growth project](#)
6. Districts, schools win [state grants](#) for energy efficiency, library services
7. Highlander Institute invites educators to register for May 3 conference on [blended learning](#) and technology

**From the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE)**

***Assessments:***

8. [PARCC](#) testing schedules posted; PARCC can be used as end-of-course measure, juniors will take NECAP assessments in October

***Reports to RIDE:***

9. [School calendars](#) to be submitted to RIDE by **May 16** –  
***Action Item***

***Health and Safety:***

10. Principals must submit reports to RIDE after each  
[emergency drill](#)

***School Finance:***

11. RIDE updates calculations of [education aid](#) for Fiscal  
Year 2015

**From the U.S. Department of Education**

12. U.S. Department of Education announces new  
[Investing in Innovation](#) grants; applications due **June 24**
13. Education, Agriculture Secretaries encourage support  
for [summer meal programs](#)
14. U.S. Department of Education to develop plan to  
strengthen [teacher-preparation programs](#)
15. Resources available on prevention of [teen dating  
violence](#) and sexual assault

**From other state agencies**

16. [Manufacturing Workforce Summit](#) scheduled for **May 29**, pre-registration required
17. Adult Education Professional Development Center, Broadband Rhode Island announce plan to improve adult [digital literacy](#)

### **From other organizations**

18. Organization seeks host families for [exchange students](#)
19. Farmers Insurance launches program to [thank teachers](#), provide teachers with grants

### **Attachments to this Field Memo**

FY 2015 Formula Updates – April 2014

---

### **Action Item Calendar**

**Today** (April 25): [NECAP Science](#) testing schedules due  
**Monday** (April 28): Selection of [induction model](#) due  
May 16: School calendars due (see [below](#))  
May 30: District [Teacher of the Year](#) nominations due  
June 20: School [Health](#) Reports due

---

## **Notes from Commissioner Gist**

### **1. LEAs encouraged to communicate with, develop plans for seniors who have not yet met graduation requirements**

Last week, you received student results on the 2014 NECAP retake. The good news is that several hundred more students have attained at least partial proficiency or made significant growth, and these students have now fulfilled this component of our Diploma System. As we continue to collect more information from you and your colleagues, our team at RIDE is compiling the data and I will make a full report on students' progress toward graduation at next month's meeting of the Board of Education.

I hope that your high-school team was able to speak about the results to as many students and families as possible before the April vacation. As you continue to plan for current seniors who have not yet met this graduation requirement, it's important that students who have not yet met this graduation requirement review with your team their next steps toward earning a diploma. If you have any procedural questions regarding students pursuing other options, such as other approved assessments, waivers, or more time in school, please contact Cali Cornell ([cali.cornell@ride.ri.gov](mailto:cali.cornell@ride.ri.gov) or 222-8251), and of course I am always available to talk with you about these matters as well.

### **2. RIDE nearing completion of ESEA Flexibility Request renewal application**

As the May 12 submission deadline approaches, we are completing the process of developing our application for renewal of our ESEA Flexibility Request, which allowed us to implement

our current system of school accountability in 2012. It has been very important to all of us at RIDE that we develop our renewal request in consultation with you and your colleagues, as well as with other school leaders, teachers, and community members. I want to thank you and your association for helping us with this process; we have been developing our renewal request based in part on input from a focus group that included several superintendents: Superintendents Auger, Barnes, Erinakes, Ricci, and Thies, as well as a head of a charter public school (Jeremy Chiapetta), and other school district leaders (Marco Andrade, Dennis Mullen, Lois Short, and Alan Tenreiro), and I want to thank all of the participants for their insights over the course of five meetings.

Overall, we intend to leave the accountability system largely unchanged, but we do have to make some changes because of our transition next year from NECAP to PARCC assessments. I want to remind you, however, that we continue to seek input on our renewal application, and to that end we have scheduled two webinars for people in the education field and for the general public as well:

- **Tuesday** (April 29), from 4:30-5:30 p.m.: [RSVP online](#)
- **Wednesday** (April 30), from 4:30-5:30 p.m.: [RSVP online](#)

(The content will be the same for both, so those interested in participating need to RSVP for only one.)

I once again invite you and others on your team to participate in either webinar, and please feel free to share this invitation with others in your community.

### **3. East Greenwich, Providence high-school seniors named as 2014 Presidential Scholar semifinalists**

The U.S. Presidential Scholars Program, at the U.S. Department of Education, has informed us that the program has selected three seniors in Rhode Island public high schools as 2014 Presidential Scholars semifinalists. Congratulations, to Alice Raynor, of Classical High School, in Providence, and to Heather Shen and Michelle Xiong, both of East Greenwich High School. The Presidential Scholar award is one of the highest honors in the country for high-school students. Alice, Heather, and Michelle are 565 semifinalists; over the next two months, the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars will select about 140 of the semifinalists as 2014 Presidential Scholars.

### **4. Pell School, Greene School selected as 2014 Green Ribbon Schools**

On Tuesday, the U.S. Department of Education announced that two Rhode Island schools have won 2014 Green Ribbon School awards: the Claiborne Pell Elementary School, in Newport, and The Greene School, a charter public school in West Greenwich.

Green Ribbon Schools are recognized “for their exemplary efforts to reduce environmental impact and utility costs, promote better health, and ensure effective environmental education, including civics and green career pathways.”

The Pell School, which is lodged in a new facility that opened at the beginning this school year, was recognized for the many design features in the building (e.g., reflective roof materials, low-velocity ventilation system, optimal orientation for daylight) as well as for its environmental and outdoors program, such as the

Fitness Gram for all students and the garden-to-table initiative. The Greene School was honored in part because of its focus on environmental literacy: teachers deliver the majority of the curriculum through environmental topics, such as energy, biodiversity, and sustainable development; students learn through multidisciplinary “learning expeditions,” such as the 100 Mile Radius Dinner, which culminates in a meal prepared with local foods.

Across Rhode Island, many of our teachers and students are deeply engaged in exciting environmental projects, ranging from community gardens to energy audits to wildlife protection. The two schools that the U.S. Department of Education recognized represent some of the best ongoing work in our communities to teach schoolchildren about the world in which we live and to ensure that our school buildings are models of green design. Congratulations to the students, teachers, school leaders, and community members who have earned these awards!

### **5. Woonsocket school complex recognized as outstanding growth project**

Grow Smart Rhode Island has awarded a 2014 Smart Growth Award to the City of Woonsocket in recognition of the Woonsocket Middle School complex, which the organization has identified as one of our Outstanding Growth Projects in the state. “The newly developed Woonsocket Middle School complex is a remarkable example of far-sighted city planning,” Grow Smart Rhode Island notes in its citation. “Following a complicated clean-up of the site and of contaminated groundwater that had threatened the Blackstone River ... the city created a safe, state-of-the-art educational complex.” The school will receive its award at the Grow Smart Rhode Island summit next month.

Congratulations to the city and school leaders in Woonsocket who brought this project to fruition!

## **6. Districts, schools win state grants for energy efficiency, library services**

Three of our school districts and one high school have received Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative grants from the Office of Energy Resources. The Chariho Regional, East Greenwich, and Lincoln School Districts have received grants totaling \$538,000 for energy-efficient lighting upgrades, boiler replacements, and installation of controls for heating systems and fans. West Warwick High School received a grant to install a solar-voltaic system on its field house and ice rink. All of these investments will save money for the school districts by lowering energy costs and they will benefit our state by supporting renewable energy. I applaud the school leaders from Chariho, East Greenwich, Lincoln, and West Warwick for responding to this grant opportunity and for investing in energy efficiency.

Yesterday, the Office of Library Services awarded Library of Rhode Island grants to the Archie R. Cole Middle School, in East Greenwich, to enable students to create short promotional videos for fiction and nonfiction books, and to the Central Falls Public Library, to work with the Central Falls School Department and other organizations to design a media-education lab and to hold a summer camp that will teach digital literacy to grade-8 students. These both sound like exciting and important programs that will benefit Rhode Island middle-school students.

## **7. Highlander Institute invites educators to register for May 3 conference on blended learning and technology**

The Highlander Institute invites educators and all friends of education to attend its 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Blended Learning & Technology Conference, on Saturday, May 3, from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., at the University of Rhode Island Providence Feinstein Campus, Media Education Lab at the Harrington School, 80 Washington St. (the Shepard Building, which also houses our RIDE offices). Richard Culatta, the Director of the Office of Educational Technology at the U.S. Department of Education, will be the keynote speaker. The conference will include both a teacher “track” (Classroom Tools and Instruction) and an administrator “track” (Decision Points and Policies). The institute is particularly reaching out administrators who may wish to attend, as specific aspects of the program will be geared toward school and district leaders. If you or your assistant superintendent are interested in registering for this conference, please contact me directly and I will provide you with registration information. More details about the conference are available here:

<http://www.blendedlearningconference.com/>

### **From RIDE**

#### ***Assessments:***

- 8. PARCC testing schedules posted; PARCC can be used as end-of-course measure, juniors will take NECAP assessments in October**

Rhode Island schools will administer PARCC assessments for the first time during the coming school year (2014-15). Students in grades 3 through high school will be taking the assessments in English language arts and mathematics. The assessments are

divided into two components: a *Performance-Based Assessment* (PBA) component, administered about 75 percent of the way through the school year, and an *End-of-Year* (EOY) component that will be administered closer to the end of the year. The length of the testing window differs depending on whether students are taking the assessment on a computer or using paper and pencil. There will be a 20-day window for each component to schedule computer-based testing and a 10-day window for paper and pencil. The computer-based window will be longer in order to provide schools sufficient time to arrange a schedule for students using electronic devices. Next month, RIDE will ask LEAs to complete a survey indicating the number of paper-pencil and the number of online assessments you will administer in each school during the coming school year.

The design of the PARCC assessments supports their use as end-of-course assessments. As such, there are two testing windows for PARCC assessments that might be used as an end-of-course measure. These assessments include English I, English II, algebra I, geometry, integrated mathematics I, and integrated mathematics II. The first testing window (December and January) aligns with courses that are completed in the first half of a school year. This first testing window will be abbreviated in the coming school year (2014-15), and assessments will be offered only in a paper-and-pencil version. The second window will be in the spring. Three PARCC assessments – English III, algebra II, and integrated mathematics III – will neither be required nor paid for by the state as part of the Rhode Island assessment program. LEAs may decide to use these assessments at the local level.

The NECAP reading and mathematics assessments in grade 11 will be administered to all juniors in October of 2014. These assessments will be used to inform graduation requirements and

for high-school accountability. Seniors may also take the NECAP assessment in October, as appropriate, to inform graduation requirements. The testing window will be slightly shorter next year, with the goal of returning results before January. It is important to note that, in the coming school year, juniors do *not* have to take the PARCC assessments, even if they are enrolled in an algebra I, geometry, integrated mathematics I, or integrated mathematics II courses, although they may choose to do so.

We have posted the complete testing windows for the coming school year on our website, at:

[www.ride.ri.gov/assessment-schedule](http://www.ride.ri.gov/assessment-schedule).

Please contact Phyllis Lynch ([phyllis.lynch@ride.ri.gov](mailto:phyllis.lynch@ride.ri.gov)) if you have any questions about the testing schedules for the coming school year.

### ***Reports to RIDE:***

#### **9. School calendars to be submitted to RIDE by May 16 – *Action Item***

This is a reminder that it is time for LEA data managers to submit 2014-15 calendars to RIDE. Data managers will be advised that calendars must be submitted using the e-ride system no later than Friday, May 16; RIDE no longer accepts hard copies of calendars. Please contact Mario Goncalves, at 222-8968 or [Mario.Goncalves@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Mario.Goncalves@ride.ri.gov), for assistance with this matter.

### ***Health and Safety:***

# **10. Principals must submit reports to RIDE after each emergency drill**

This is a reminder that all emergency-drill information must be entered in eRIDE following the completion of each drill. This information is monitored by RIDE on a regular basis. The principal of each school is responsible for the successful implementation of the Rhode Island fire-safety statutes, including the timely and accurate reporting of emergency drills.

In accordance with state law ([§16-21-4](#), [§16-21-5](#)), all schools (public and nonpublic) in Rhode Island are required to perform 15 emergency drills that include fire, lockdown, and evacuation drills. At least one drill shall be conducted each month, and at least one out of every four must be obstructed drills. As part of the required 15 emergency drills, each school must conduct two evacuation drills and two lockdown drills. One lockdown drill shall occur in September and one in January.

You can access the “Health and Safety of Pupils” statutes on the Rhode Island General Assembly website, at:

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/title16/16-21/16-21-4.HTM>

and

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/title16/16-21/16-21-5.HTM>

***School Finance:***

## **11. RIDE updates calculations of education aid for Fiscal Year 2015**

As part of the funding-formula law, state education aid is based on data from one year prior to the year in which the state distributes the aid. Therefore, we must base Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 aid on enrollment and free- or reduced-price lunch data from FY 2014. To fulfill this mandate, we collected data on student enrollments and free- or reduced-price lunch status from the beginning of the current school year through last month. We then annualized this information to reflect a full year. We also adjusted the calculations to account for the results of the charter-public-school lotteries held last month. Remember that the funding formula spreads all changes over the remaining years of the transition: 4 years for those LEAs that currently receive insufficient state funding and 7 years for those LEAs that currently receive an excess of state funding. See the attached analysis (FY 2015 Formula Updates – April 2014) for the changes by LEA.

Please note that we have forwarded this data to the Governor's Office and to the General Assembly for their consideration. No changes will go into effect until the General Assembly passes, and Governor Chafee signs, the annual appropriations bill.

If you have any questions about these aid calculations, please contact Kristen Cole, at 222-4681 or [kristen.cole@ride.ri.gov](mailto:kristen.cole@ride.ri.gov).

**From the U.S. Department of Education**

## **12. Education, Agriculture Secretaries encourage support for summer meal programs**

Please see this letter from Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Thomas J. Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture:

Dear Colleague:

Children are America's greatest treasure, and ensuring they have the proper nutrition to learn, grow up healthy, and reach their full potential is one of our most important duties as community members, educators, and leaders. Nearly 50 years ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared the War on Poverty, a set of initiatives that continues to expand educational opportunities, secure economic equality, and provide nutritious meals to those in need. Our nation has a long and impressive history of ensuring that its needy citizens, especially children, have enough food in order to thrive. Your leadership can help to ensure that those same children do not go hungry in your community this summer.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) summer meal programs that are available to schools include the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). These programs operate in partnership with the federal government, state agencies, and local organizations to serve free meals to children age 18 years and younger. The USDA provides reimbursement for meals; state agencies administer the program; and local organizations, including schools, nonprofits, parks and recreation departments, libraries, and faith-based groups serve the meals. Summer meals programs are critical to children in need because we know that only a portion of students participate in summer meal programs compared with those who participate during the school year. During the 2012-13 school year,

approximately 21-million children were served free and reduced-price meals while only approximately 3.5-million children participated in a meal program during the summer of 2013.

We need your leadership and assistance to help feed hungry children this coming summer. There are many ways you can assist, but, specifically, you can:

*Provide children in your community with meals at your schools this summer.* Local schools are the best sites for summer feeding efforts. Children and parents are familiar with local schools, and schools are known for providing nutritious food in a safe environment. Even if your school will not be offering summer school, if it is located in a low-income area it can be a summer feeding site and fill that important meal gap for students so that they are ready to learn when they return to school in the fall.

*Ask teachers and staff in your schools to share information about nearby summer meal sites, whether the site is at your school or at other locations in your community.* School leaders can find local feeding sites by calling (866) 3-HUNGRY or (877) 8-HAMBRE or by visiting [www.whyhunger.org/findfood](http://www.whyhunger.org/findfood). Schools communicate regularly and effectively with the families of children in your community. You can help reach out and connect these families with summer meals before the school year ends and continue to make a difference in the lives of your students throughout the summer.

*Be a champion in your community.* As a recognized leader, you have many opportunities to meet with other

community leaders and organizations that have an interest in ensuring children have resources to succeed. Take the time to discuss summer meals programs and how others can get involved by becoming a sponsor or site that serves meals.

To learn more about the USDA summer meal programs visit:

[www.summerfood.usda.gov](http://www.summerfood.usda.gov).

In addition, the Food and Nutrition Service regional office staff is available to provide technical assistance and answer any questions you may have on USDA summer meal programs at the following link:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns-regional-offices>.

Thank you, as always, for your dedication and commitment to our children. By working together, we can be sure our children have the food and nutrition needed to continue to grow and succeed.

### **13. U.S. Department of Education announces new Investing in Innovation grants; applications due June 24**

The U.S. Department of Education has announced the start of the 2014 grant competition for the [Investing in Innovation \(i3\)](#) program's Scale-up and Validation categories. This competition will continue the U.S. Department of Education investments in promising strategies that can help close achievement gaps and improve educational outcomes for our neediest students.

The i3 program aims to develop and expand practices that accelerate student achievement and prepare students to succeed in college and in their careers. As in years past, the program includes three grant categories: Development, Validation and Scale-up. This year, school districts and nonprofit organizations, in partnership with districts or schools, are eligible to compete for nearly \$135 million across all three categories. The maximum grant amount available in each category is based on the evidence of effectiveness.

In March, the U.S. Department of Education announced the i3 Development competition for grants of up to \$3 million, and received nearly 400 applications. For this competition, Validation grants will provide up to \$12 million to fund projects with moderate evidence of effectiveness. Scale-up grants will provide up to \$20 million to fund projects with strong evidence of effectiveness and enable expansion across the country. All i3 projects conduct an independent evaluation to identify what works in education.

The [Notices Inviting Applications](#) are published in the Federal Register, and applications for the Scale-up and Validation grants are due **June 24**. To access the notices for the categories, visit:

*Scale-up*

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-04-23/pdf/2014-09263.pdf>

*Validation*

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-04-23/pdf/2014-09262.pdf>

To learn more about the Investing in Innovation Fund, visit:

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/innovation/index.html>.

**14. U.S. Department of Education to develop plan to strengthen teacher-preparation programs**

Please see this notice from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Communications and Outreach:

Research confirms that the most important factor in a student's success in school is a strong teacher. However, almost two-thirds of new teachers report that their teacher-preparation program left them unprepared for the realities of the classroom. Moreover, for decades, institutions that prepare teachers have lacked the feedback needed to identify their strengths and weaknesses and had little information on where program graduates go to teach, how long they stay, and how they perform in the classroom.

Today, President Obama directed the U.S. Department of Education to lay out a plan to strengthen America's teacher-preparation programs for public discussion by this summer and to move forward on schedule to publish a final rule within the next year. The Administration will encourage and support states in developing systems that recognize excellence and provide all programs with information to help them improve while holding them accountable for how well they prepare teachers to succeed in today's classrooms and throughout their careers.

Specifically, the U.S. Department of Education plan will:

- build on state systems and efforts and the progress in the field to encourage all states to develop their own meaningful systems to identify high- and low-performing teacher-preparation programs across all kinds of programs, not just those based in colleges and universities;
- ask states to move away from current input-focused reporting requirements, streamline the current data requirements, incorporate more meaningful outcomes, and improve the availability of relevant information on teacher preparation; and
- rely on state-developed program ratings of preparation programs to determine program eligibility for [TEACH grants](#), which are available to students who are planning to become teachers in a high-need field in a low-income school.

## **15. Resources available on prevention of teen dating violence and sexual assault**

Please see this message from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Communications and Outreach:

Every year, about 1 in 10 American teenagers experiences physical violence at the hands of a boyfriend or girlfriend, and many others are sexually and emotionally abused. The U.S. Department of Education is dedicated to working with students, families, educators, and communities to prevent abuse and support survivors. A new [compilation of resources](#) provides information to support schools and communities in their efforts to create safe, healthy learning environments and to identify, investigate, and remedy teen dating violence and sexual assault. (Note: This month is

National Child Abuse Prevention Month and Sexual Assault Awareness Month; see [blog post](#).)

### **From other state agencies**

#### **16. Manufacturing Workforce Summit scheduled for May 29, pre-registration required**

On May 29, the Governor's Workforce Board, the Rhode Island Manufacturers Association, and the Rhode Island Manufacturing Extension Service will hold the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Manufacturing Workforce Summit: Engineering the Manufacturing Talent Pipeline. The summit will run from 8 to 10:30 a.m., at the Providence Marriott Downtown, 1 Orms St. The event is free, but [pre-registration](#) is required by **May 22**.

#### **17. Adult Education Professional Development Center, Broadband Rhode Island announce plan to improve adult digital literacy**

The Rhode Island Adult Education Professional Development Center and Broadband Rhode Island have announced the launch of an agreement to develop and implement a plan for long-term sustainability of the Broadband Rhode Island Digital Literacy Project to improve adult Internet usage across the state. As part of the federally funded initiative, Broadband Rhode Island created a digital literacy program for adults, including curriculum and instructor training and established a thriving network of more than 200 volunteer and professional digital literacy trainers whose efforts target the state's disadvantaged populations. To date,

these instructors delivered digital literacy training to almost 1,000 adults through libraries, public housing authorities, adult education organizations, and senior centers.

The Professional Development Center and Broadband Rhode Island have outlined plans for numerous activities throughout this year that are designed to strengthen the Digital Literacy Project. The two organizations will work in partnership to develop a sustainable digital literacy trainer network, through adult education organizations and libraries, that does not rely solely on volunteers.

The work plan for 2014 also includes development of a recognized standard for digital literacy outcomes and establishment of criteria for evaluating adult learners' readiness to apply digital literacy skills to tasks such as participating in distance learning and completing essential life skills tasks online.

For the complete news release, see:

[http://broadband.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Public/RIAEPDC\\_BBRI\\_final\\_2.pdf](http://broadband.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Public/RIAEPDC_BBRI_final_2.pdf)

### **From other organizations**

#### **18. Organization seeks host families for exchange students**

The Council for Educational Travel USA is seeking host families who would welcome exchange students who will be arriving in Rhode Island in August. Each exchange student will have a minimum of three years of English-language instruction, and they

will carry health and accident insurance. The Rhode Island coordinator is Michelle Blanding, at [angelsandchins@aol.com](mailto:angelsandchins@aol.com). More information about the program is available at [www.cetusa.org](http://www.cetusa.org).

**19. Farmers Insurance launches program to thank teachers, provide teachers with grants**

Farmers Insurance has launched a Thank a Million Teachers campaign to recognize and thank teachers across the nation for the difference they make in our children's lives in thousands of classrooms every day. There are two components to the program; the first is the ability to thank a deserving teacher and the second is the opportunity for those "thanked" to apply for a \$2,500 grant.

Information about the program is available here:

[www.thankamillionteachers.com](http://www.thankamillionteachers.com).

***RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:***

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/CommissionerDeborahAGist/FieldMemos.aspx>